

## APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

### 2014 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Rural Action, Inc.

Application ID: 14AC155926

Program Name: Ohio Stream RestoreCorps

For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing specific feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of the application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory. Comments are not representative of all of the information used in the final funding decision.

#### Reviewers' Summary Comments:

##### Strengths:

The applicant delineates the needs to restore and improve the ecosystems in the Appalachian Ohio region. The applicant cites recent statistical data on high unemployment and poverty rates to substantiate the severity of the need and impacts on citizens.

The applicant clearly describes the demographics of the target area of Appalachian Ohio to justify the need for the project.

The applicant presents a persuasive narrative aligning an improved ecosystem to tourism and economic development opportunities. To support the direct and indirect impacts of eco-tourism, the applicant cites regional data from a June 2010 study of Morgan County that shared statistics on job creation and increased business opportunities related to tourism.

The applicant clearly articulates the link between improved natural spaces, ecotourism, and employment, with the role the project and AmeriCorps members have in those activities.

Without AmeriCorps members, a substantial percentage of intervention activities could not be accomplished. AmeriCorps members developed a dedicated coalition of partners as well as volunteers to continue restoration activities once the applicant's AmeriCorps program ends.

The engagement of AmeriCorps members in collaborative efforts with partners, such as the Appalachian Green Teachers Program and Mud Run Stream Keepers, has enabled the applicant to expand its environmental restoration and educational strategies throughout the region, resulting in more beneficial impacts from intervention activities.

The applicant cites grant and annual reports focused on the Central Appalachia area and uses multiple sources related to different aspects of the project (including case studies of the project activities in Appalachian, Ohio) providing

adequate justification for the project.

The role of AmeriCorps members in achieving the goals of the project is clearly documented and the need for members to achieve the goals of the project is clear.

The research cited focused on different aspects of the project (sustainable development, economic effects, environmental education, and tourism) providing justification for the comprehensive activities within their project.

The applicant has met or exceeded performance targets in intervention activities over the last three years (2009-2012). The utilization of AmeriCorps members in intervention activities has resulted in substantial program improvement. The applicant cites, as an example, a significant increase in the amount of waste recycled, from 36% to 89%, at the Nelsonville Music Festival.

The applicant tripled the number of hours targeted in previous years.

The applicant contracted an external evaluation of previous years and found areas of improvement that were then included in 2012-2013 systems.

The science score data for children in the environmental education activities was collected and analyzed before and after program implementation and showed marked improvement.

The applicant surpassed target goals in citizen engagement and recycling initiatives in previous years demonstrating the success of their project.

#### Weaknesses:

Although the applicant describes the needs, quantitative details on the number of watersheds, and trails the individuals who will receive environmental education are not noted in the narrative.

The applicant was not consistent in describing the details of all aspects of intervening activities in the application narrative and logic model. The logic model did not include dosage (number of days per week for inputs), miles of trail to clean up, or number of individuals to receive environmental education training.

The logic model does not include quantities for the outputs listed, number of locations and sites for activities, and the dosages of the activities.

The applicant mostly alluded to benefits as documented in reports without elaborating on research design or results.

Although the applicant has met or exceeded performance targets, prior performance of eco-tourism success in the region is not presented. The applicant does highlight the reopening of Burr Oak and Lake Hope Lodges as examples of "potential job creation;" however, specific/actual prior year job creation data linked to environmental restoration and education activities is not provided.